



Diversity & Inclusion

Leadership Discussion Guide

Introduction

As a leader at your organization, you have an important role to play in diversity and inclusion efforts. You are key to bringing inclusivity to the forefront of your employees' minds, helping them learn the benefits of diverse teams, and promoting educational efforts that dismantle hurtful biases that prevent upward momentum and disrupt innovation.

The Blue Ocean Brain *Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Discussion Guide* and the Blue Ocean Brain content library are both tools that can help you navigate these topics more successfully.

As you read, you'll see discussion questions and ice breakers to prepare you to have open dialogue with your direct reports, along with some extended learning resources that will help you dive deeper into topics for further discussion and reference. If you feel uncertain about how to proceed at any point while reading this information, reach out to an expert for advice, whether it's a D&I consultant or an HR leader at your workplace. People who care about this conversation are happy to help when someone is asking.

Your organization is counting on you to lead the way toward an inclusive workplace.

**Are you
ready to carry
the torch?**

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Part I: Preparing to Discuss Diversity & Inclusion in the Workplace

The Leader-Employee Perception Gap

Despite diversity and inclusion efforts, we're missing the mark as leaders. A 2019 Accenture report shows that while leaders say a culture of equality is important and they think their organizations are inclusive, their employees feel very differently.

	% of Leaders Who Believe the Statement is True	% of Employees Who Believe the Statement is True
Leaders are creating empowering environments in which employees can be themselves, raise concerns, and innovate without fear.	68%	36%
Employees feel included and are welcome to contribute fully.	98%	79%
Employees have control over how they complete their work.	76%	29%
Employees feel comfortable reporting a range of sensitive issues such as mental health needs or discriminatory behavior of a senior colleague.	82%	67%



According to Alyssa E. Rippey and Elana Newman with the Women's Rights Project published through the ACLU, 69 percent of women who wear a headscarf at work report at least one incident of discrimination compared to 29 percent of women who do not wear a headscarf.

The Benefits of Inclusive Organizations

The statistics on the previous page show a pretty significant perception gap between leaders and employees, but if we put forth determined efforts to boost inclusivity and diversity, we can close it, and our organizations will reap the rewards. Here are a few of the benefits, according to Linda A. Hill, the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School:

- + Higher representation of women in C-suite level positions results in **34%** greater returns to shareholders.
- + Companies with higher-than-average diversity had **19%** higher revenues from enhanced or entirely new products or services.
- + Companies in the top quarter for racial/ethnic diversity are **35%** more likely to surpass peers, while those in the same bracket for gender diversity are **15%** more likely to do the same.

Discussion Starter #1

The Discussion Starters throughout this guide are designed to engage your employees in meaningful conversation. To begin, encourage your employees to be open and respectful of one another.



TIP: Use these Ice Breakers to launch D&I discussions with your teams.

Ice Breaker: Did you know that 98% of surveyed leaders think employees feel fully included and empowered to be themselves at work, but only 79% of employees feel the same way? Do you think those statistics are correct?

Deeper Group Discussion:

- 1 Do you feel safe to be yourself at work?
- 2 Do you feel welcome and included in meetings? If not, what do you need from me so you can get there?
- 3 In what ways can I support you and help you at work?
- 4 In what areas does our organization need to grow regarding inclusion and diversity?
- 5 Do you have some suggestions for how we might be more inclusive?



Pro-Inclusion Tip:

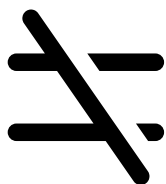
Listen to the experiences of others, especially those with marginalized identities (those groups treated as insignificant or peripheral) who often don't have an equal say in decision-making. Give them the floor in meetings or on calls, even if it means silencing yourself to do so. You learn more when you listen than when you speak.

Part II: Becoming Aware of Biases

Implicit Biases

Implicit biases are negative beliefs you're not aware that you have, but can still affect your understanding of, actions toward, and decisions about other people. They affect various ethnicities, ages, sexualities, abilities, genders, and body types, and though our biases can include both good and bad assessments, both can be harmful.

At work, implicit biases can fly under the radar, affecting our interactions with colleagues. Likewise, hiring processes and decisions can often be filled with implicit biases as people tend to more favorably view people who look, act, and sound like them.



In a stark study on implicit bias in the hiring process, Black applicants *without* a criminal record were about as likely to be called for a second interview as a White applicant *with* a criminal record when the resume was otherwise identical.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are small jokes, veiled insults, or acts of power that negatively comment on a person's gender, race, ethnicity, or culture. They may seem small in the moment (a papercut), but when compounded (a thousand papercuts), they can cause real harm.

Examples of microaggressions might include joking with a female boss that she must be the secretary, asking a U.S. citizen of Asian ancestry where they are from, touching a Black person's hair, or questioning someone about their accent.



These slights can be corrosive because they are difficult to quantify. What's more, the victim of bias is often accused of being overly sensitive, not taking a joke, or not accepting a "compliment" that isn't very complimentary at all.

Interrupting Biases

So, how do you interrupt biases you don't know you have, and in some cases, are adamantly opposed to?



Be proactive. You're already making the first step by boosting your education. That's a great start.



Reach out. Ask for honest and direct feedback from employees and colleagues about your speech and behavior. You might need someone else to shine a light on areas where you're in the dark.



Be open. When someone gives you feedback, pay close attention to what they say and try not to take it personally. Often, our implicit biases are in direct opposition to what we actually believe.

Discussion Starter #2

Remind people that knowing biases exist isn't enough. We must actively take steps to counteract them like paying attention to what we say, holding others accountable, using positive visualizations of groups about whom we tend to be biased, and seeking out diversity in our interactions, entertainment, and education.



Ice Breaker: A Human Rights Campaign study revealed that 53% of LGBTQ workers report hearing jokes about lesbian or gay workers on the job. Do you think that's reflective of our workplace?

Deeper Group Discussion:

- 1 Without naming names, what other sorts of microaggressions, jokes, or euphemisms seem to get tossed around at our organization?
- 2 Have I personally said or done something that lacked sensitivity?

Can you suggest some appropriate responses when we witness someone expressing personal biases? (i.e. "That comment was racist. Is that what you meant to say?" or "We don't make sexist comments here.")
- 3 Can you suggest some appropriate responses from the person who gets called out? (i.e. "I'm sorry for the offense I caused. I hear you," or "I didn't realize that was ableist and I apologize. I won't repeat it.")
- 4



Pro-Inclusion Tip:

Acknowledge that everyone has unconscious biases no matter who we are. Our brains prompt us to hold onto them, and though we cannot always control those messages we receive, we can certainly control what we do with them.

Part III: Building an Inclusive Environment

Working Toward Inclusivity

Although biases may be happening inside your workgroup, there are some easy changes you can make so your office is as inclusive as it can be.

Change 1: Set up a rotation for office housework.

And don't ask for volunteers. A rotation makes it clear that everyone is expected to restock paper, clean out the office fridge, unjam the copier, etc. If you ask for volunteers, marginalized people often feel pressure to prove they are team players by raising their hands.

Change 2: Mindfully hand out high-value projects.

Reconsider who is capable of doing important jobs. Look outside of your small team of champions. Chances are good someone not on your usual list can handle the job, says Joyce Norcini, former general counsel for Nokia Siemens Networks.

Change 3: Respond quickly to double standards and idea theft.

Men tend to interrupt women far more often than the other way around, and directness decreases women's influence but increases men's. Call it out when it happens. In addition, when you see instances of majority-group members taking or being given credit for ideas that women and people of color originally offered, speak up and give the idea originators their due.

Change 4: Seek opinions from those who don't speak up.

Some people are brought up to be modest or quiet, which can lead them to hold back their opinions. Counter this by actively seeking out their thoughts. "Jackie, you're experienced, here. What's your take on this?"



Women comprise just 3% of Fortune Global 500 CEOs, according to a research report by LeanIn.org.

Building Belonging

Fostering belonging is one step further than increasing diversity or building inclusion. Belonging involves being part of a group, sharing with others, and feeling secure enough to be who you really are. No matter where we come from, we all want to belong. It's human nature and the one thing we have in common.

When employees feel they belong, performance and retention increase. When they feel they don't belong, their work can suffer. And if enough people feel the same, the entire company can suffer.

How to Build Belonging

- + Value everyone's contributions.
- + Encourage free expression.
- + Recognize accomplishments.
- + Communicate transparently.
- + Help others feel comfortable at work.

Have you heard of the term *intersectionality*?

Basically, it's the way in which different forms of discrimination overlap. For instance, a woman who is also a member of the LGBTQ community or someone who is disabled and also a person of color faces different and greater discrimination than someone who carries one marginalized identity.



Discussion Starter #3

Remind people that everyone is here to learn and do better, and an open and honest exchange is part of that process.



Ice Breaker: Stanford University research shows that helping minorities feel like they belong significantly reduces stress levels and improves physical health, emotional well-being, and performance.

Deeper Group Discussion:

- 1 If you're a minority, can you comment on that? How does your stress level impact your performance?
- 2 If you're not a minority, how does your stress level impact your performance? Can you empathize with those who might have intersectional stressors?
- 3 How can I be more transparent in my communication to you?
- 4 How would you like to be recognized for your accomplishments?
- 5 What concrete steps can we take to ensure everyone feels comfortable to express themselves?



Pro-Inclusion Tip

Someone's race or ethnicity isn't a taboo topic. Talk openly about it to appeal to people's conscious values and challenge their unconscious biases. You cannot address racial injustice in the workplace if you do not acknowledge that different experiences exist for people.

Part IV: Taking Action and Gaining Momentum

5 Tips for Talking About D&I Issues

We get it. Talking about diversity and inclusion can be incredibly sensitive. You don't want to make a mistake and risk hurting someone or diving into an HR issue. But the fact is, not talking openly about diversity and inclusion means choosing to compound the issues that are already prevalent. Discrimination exists whether we like it or not.

And staying quiet is a sign of privilege; people with marginalized identities do not get the option of ignoring the issues they fight every day. To support their efforts, here are five tips for addressing sensitive topics with your team:



Keep it anonymous. If you need to talk about experiencing bias or witnessing it, keep names out of it for the sake of everyone involved.



Ask for help. You might not be an expert on LGBTQ sensitivity or the biases faced by women of color, and that's okay. Reach out to those from marginalized identities and ask for their leadership, making sure to compensate them for their time when you do.



Appeal to emotion. When you're trying to enact change, get to the heart of the matter. Logic supports our emotions and is often used to justify our decisions, but research says we tend to use logic only after we've made our decisions.



Be clear and concise. Avoid vague statements about equity and state specifically what you want to happen at your organization.



Follow up with action. Words are great, but they don't enact change. Incorporate a strategy to execute policy change and state clearly how you'll measure results.



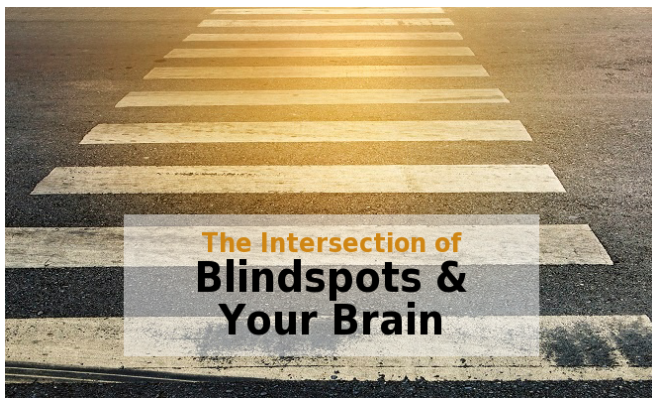
Pro-Inclusion Tip

Pay attention to what you say! Say "Hey, team," or "Hey, everyone," instead of "Hey, guys." Say "That's incredible," instead of "That's insane." Say "I must've missed that," instead of "I must be blind."

Resources for Deeper Learning

Not every topic related to diversity and inclusion can be covered in one guide. Blue Ocean Brain's ever-expanding library of microlearning resources covers a range of topics that can help you educate yourself and generate discussion points to educate your team, as well.

In this section, we have included some complimentary lessons to help you get started. Click on the images below to access these microlessons, designed to deliver modern, inspirational, and actionable learning in just ten minutes:



Discussion Starter #4

Explain to your team that though you're not a diversity and inclusion expert, you are here to learn and will welcome feedback they have to share.



Ice Breaker: Did you know that men of color are 25% less likely than their white peers to get a raise when they ask for one as reported by a recent Payscale study? How does that statement make you feel?

Deeper Group Discussion:

- 1 In a previous position, have you ever asked for a promotion, change, or raise and believe you were held back?
- 2 How could a leader support their team members who want to advance but are afraid to ask?
- 3 Finish this sentence: The best leader I've ever had did these three things...
- 4 Where do you want to be in five years? How can I support you in your organizational goals?

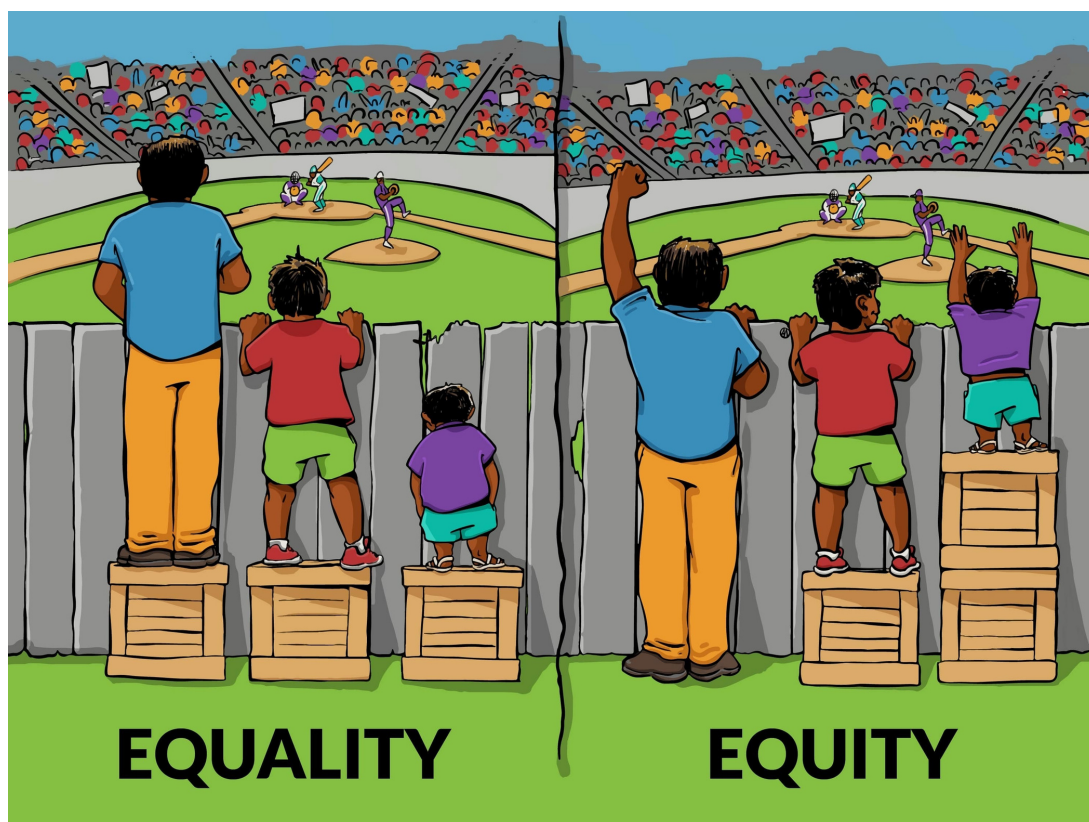


Pro-Inclusion Tip

To create unity in your group, talk about your organization's shared values. Use common examples of cooperation that everyone can relate to no matter their identities, like hospital staff working in unison to save a patient or sports teammates playing together to win the game. We're all human and we all want to feel like we are part of something greater than ourselves.

Part V: Looking Forward: Equity, Not Equality

Equality is a noble goal. Equal treatment and access to opportunities help each of us perform our best within a shared set of parameters. But we really need to be striving for *equity*, where we focus on the equality of the outcome, not the equality of the experience by taking individual needs and skills into account.



Source: Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire



A powerful example of equity in action, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations and sets standards for accessibility in public places.

A Challenge:

Ready to make a difference in your organization?

Krishna Kumar, founder of the Intrad School of Executive Coaching (ISEC) and former president of the International Association of Coaching (IAC), says to take some time to step back and reflect on the diversity and inclusion strategies you are presently pursuing. Then, identify the objectives, aspirations, and ideas you have around this change effort. Finally, list your three greatest strengths you can leverage to meet the goals, followed by possible actions you can take to start the process.

You can be the leader who helps your employees feel like they belong and encourages them to live authentically at work, a goal for every single individual no matter who they happen to be.

Are you ready to carry the torch?

Grounded in neuroscience and proven modern learning methodologies, Blue Ocean Brain is a pioneering microlearning firm that combines collaborative consultation, award-winning content, and a flexible design solution to help clients of all sizes and industries develop a culture of continuous development and inclusion that supports strategic priorities and critical learning initiatives.

To learn more, visit blueoceanbrain.com.

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